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ABSTRACT

Professors teaching educational administration at the University of Oklahoma used a goal prioritization process to develop a core curriculum for their administrator preparation program. They first developed a needs sensing instrument to be administered to Oklahoma school administrators to reveal their perceptions of the educational needs of administrators. A Q sort test was developed requiring respondents to prioritize 36 program goals. After a pilot test, university faculty and graduate students visited 314 Oklahoma administrators and introduced, explained, and administered the test. The highest ranked needs concerned personnel evaluation and development, administrator legal responsibility, decision-making, and public relations. Analysis revealed a high level of consistency between the rankings. Subjects proved enthusiastic about the process, and selected administrators served as advisory committee members to discuss this assessment and the feasibility of another assessment of their own inservice needs. This needs assessment also led to the identification of a set of educational learning experiences to be required of all educational administrators. (Author/JM)

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Program Preparation Priorities for Educational Administration

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INTRODUCTION

by
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Comprehensive educational administration program revision at the University of Oklahoma has not been addressed during the past two decades. Debate, among professors teaching administration courses, regarding content and learning experiences has been discussed but not acted upon. Never has there been agreement on a core of experiences for all prospective administrators that would precede preparation for specific administrative roles. Coupled with the problem was the recognition that an increasing variety of roles in both the public and private sector was emerging. This prompted those faculty members who were responsible for the general administration (chief executive and other system-wide administrative positions) portion of the preparation program to initiate action on their own. Responsibility was assumed to attempt identification of a set of educational experiences that would be appropriate for all administrator candidates as an initial part of their preparation program.

Professors were concerned not only with merging preparation for the public school administrative roles, which we felt required providing common experiences for all who might seek these positions, but we were also aware of the increasing number of our students planning to work in settings other than the public schools. General administration professors wanted to provide a common core of preparation experiences that could be applied to the various specialized administrative roles in the schools as well as the variety of administrative roles in other public and private agencies.

The staff decided the beginning phase of a program revision would be completion of a needs assessment among practicing administrators throughout the State of Oklahoma. Those needs identified could serve as a segment of the base for planning a sound administrator preparation core in addition to assisting with the identification of more specific elements that might be incorporated in the preparation of administrators for specialized roles.

IDENTIFYING THE ITEMS

A review of the literature for educational administrator preparation suggested content items to be used in the development of a needs sensing instrument. The faculty members involved then added items relating to their respective special interests. Also, in interaction with each other, additional items were inserted that arose from their various contacts with practitioners in the field.

The accumulation of items was examined in numerous meetings involving the general administration faculty members. Where there was overlapping, items were combined. Where there was consensus that they should be, items were eliminated. The entire process led to the identification of 36 items which could serve to evoke responses and identify the needs perceived by practitioners as important for administrator preparation programs.

DEVELOPING THE INSTRUMENT

In the beginning discussions of instrumental development, the staff agreed that a means should be devised that would allow each administrator to identify priorities among the possible needs to be served. Earlier the group reached consensus that some form of forced choice selection was called for. Furthermore, it was agreed that for busy administrators responses should be made as mechanically simple as possible. The group agreed that the best approach would be to actually visit school districts, administer the instrument, and then engage in infor-

mal discussion with administrators concerning their responses. Faculty members hoped the discussion would bring out concerns that were not covered by the 36 administrator preparation content items. The form which finally emerged was a Q sort technique using a deck of small cards with one item printed on each card. The plan was that each administrator would arrange the cards in order of priority from one through thirty-six. Selection of this prioritizing method required a plan for directions which would enable participants to understand the procedure in order that responses would be as accurate a reflection of their real views as possible. A major factor in the results would be motivating respondents to spend the time and effort to arrange the 36 cards in a sequence that reflected their opinions.

It was decided the best approach would be to use a flow chart. The flow chart developed to demonstrate the process is reproduced in Figure 1. As indicated in the chart, participants were asked to arrange the cards in four columns of nine each. They were then asked to switch cards from one column to another, as well as vertically in the columns, until such time as each of the four columns reflected the participant's best judgment regarding priorities.

THE PILOT STUDY

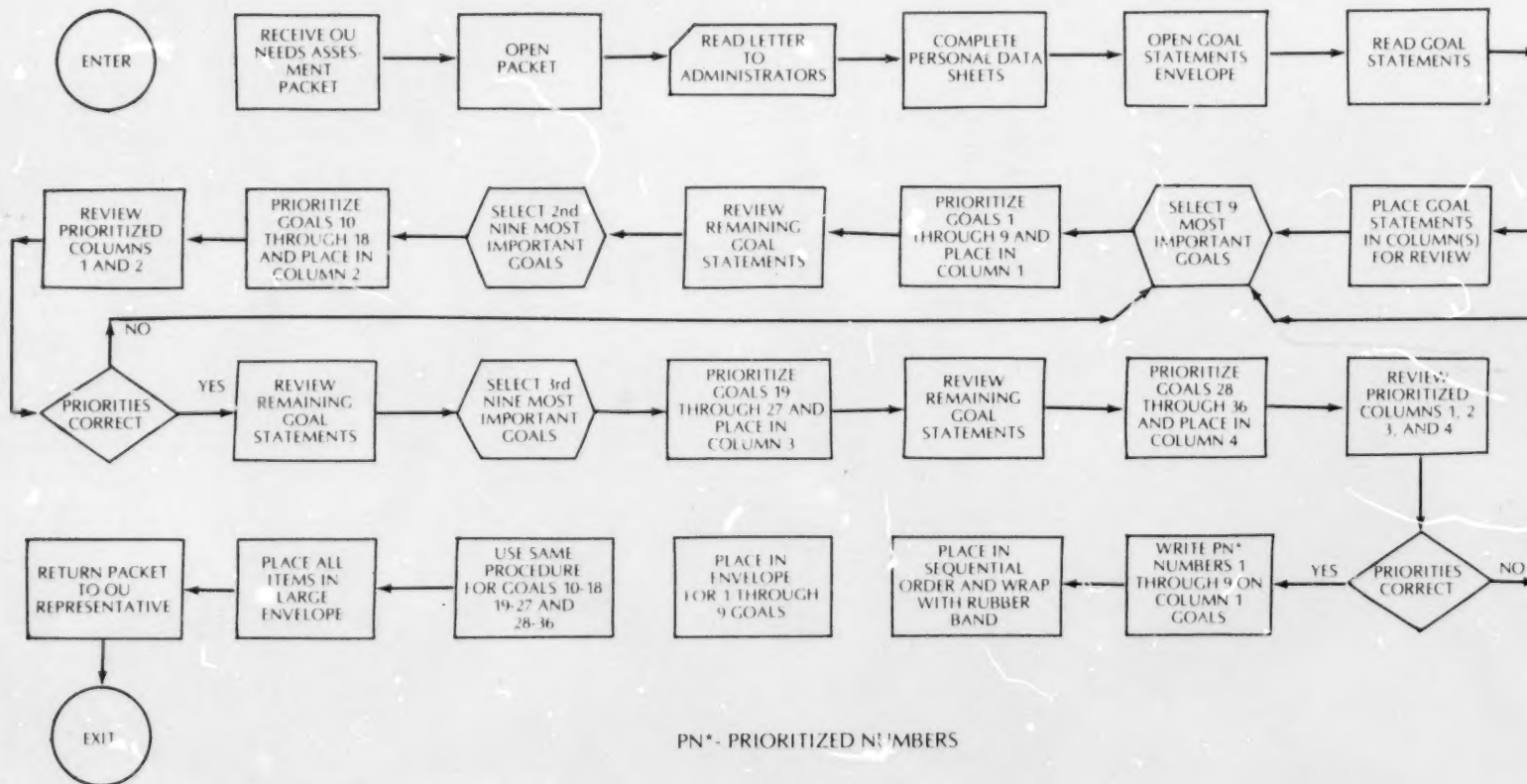
The persons most accessible for a pilot study of the instrument and the procedure were the students in our educational administration classes. Each of the faculty members involved examined class rolls and identified the students who were occupying various administrative roles.

Suggestions made by the pilot study participants were carefully recorded and the appropriate changes were made in the instrument and the procedures. A packet was assembled that contained a letter to the administrator, the flow chart, the thirty-six cards, and the appropriate supplies.

THE SAMPLE

Practitioners holding major administrative positions in Oklahoma public school systems comprised the majority of the study's 314 subjects. However, it was agreed that it was important to include individuals in the sample from professional organizations, colleagues in other institutions preparing administrators, and persons from other education agencies such as the State Department of Education. It was also considered important to select a sample that was reasonably representative of the different sizes of school systems in Oklahoma as well as the different regions of the State. The school systems and other organizations throughout the State that would provide the representative sample desired were

Figure 1
OKLAHOMA UNIVERSITY
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
PREPARATION PROGRAM
GOAL PRIORITIZATION PROCESS



identified. A faculty and graduate assistant team schedule that extended over several months was established for visiting the sites. Faculty members, with the help of a graduate assistant, visited the sample sites and collected the desired information. The procedure involved contacting the chief administrator by telephone, explaining the project and making an appointment in each situation. The administrator was asked to assemble central office staff and as many principals as were considered feasible. It was pointed out that it would require from one to two hours to administer the instrument and to engage in whatever discussion might be considered appropriate. There were scheduling problems in a few instances, but the willingness to participate was virtually unanimous. Of the more than twenty-five school districts visited, only one district decided not to participate.

The visits themselves turned out to be valuable to the faculty members who participated. They were able to grasp a "feel" for problems as perceived by practicing administrators that they had not imagined previously. University Professors working with school systems also seemed to have a favorable impact on practicing administrators. Visits were cited by the Dean of the College of Education to the University Regents as being among the most useful public relations efforts of the College.

Upon completion of the process, the ensuing discussion was productive and revealing. The instrument brought out the concerns of the practicing administrators in ways that otherwise would not have been possible.

DATA ANALYSIS

A forced choice technique was used to prioritize the thirty-six educational administration preparation program goal statements. The goal statements were placed on cards and numbered to assist with administration consistency. The numbers were assigned to the goal statements by using a table of random numbers and had no relation to their rank or priority.

A modified Q sort method was developed in order that selected administrator practitioners could rank order the administrator preparation goal statements. Each administrator in the sample was asked to rank the thirty-six goal statements from most important (the administrator preparation goal considered by the respondent to be number 1) to least important (the administration preparation goal considered by the respondent to be number 36).

A computer program was developed to assist with analysis of the goal statement rankings. Ranking weights were reversed so that a ranking of number one was assigned a weight of 36, and continuing through number thirty-six which received a weight of 1. The analysis was performed for each of the categories listed on the participant personal information data sheet.

COMMENTS OF THE FINDINGS

An analysis of the findings revealed a relatively high level of consistency between the rankings assigned by the total sample and the rankings by positions and by sizes of school systems. Sample analysis charts (1 and 2) are included to demonstrate the study's reporting format.

Chart 1

PRIORITIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PREPARATION PROGRAM GOAL STATEMENTS

Develop Competence in Selection, Development and Evaluation of Personnel		Develop an Understand- ing of the Legal Respon- sibilities of Administrators		Develop and Understand- ing of Decision Making Processes		Develop Competence in Public Relations	
GROUP	RANK	RANK	RANK	RANK	RANK	RANK	RANK
Total Sample	(314) 1	2	3	4			
Position							
Superintendents	(32) 2	5	1	4			
Ass't. Superintendents	(36) 1	3	2	7			
Secondary Principals	(66) 1	2	3	4			
Elementary Principals	(100) 1	2	5	4			
Number of Employees in Organization							
To 100	(50) 1	4	2	5			
101 to 250	(56) 1	3	4	2			
251 to 400	(61) 1	2	3	6			
401 or more	(147) 1	3	2	4			

Chart 2

**PRIORITIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PREPARATION PROGRAM GOAL STATEMENTS**

	Develop an Understanding of The Skills Needed To Conduct Research in Educational Administration	Develop an Understanding of Political Systems and Processes	Develop and Understanding of The Use of Computers Both in The Operation of Educational Institutions and in The Decision Making Process	Develop and Understanding of The Historical Evolution of Education in The United States
GROUP	RANK	RANK	RANK	RANK
Total Sample	(314) 33	34	35	36
Position				
Superintendents	(32) 31	32	34	36
Ass't. Superintendents	(36) 33	32	34	36
Secondary Principals	(66) 34	33	35	36
Elementary Principals	(100) 32	35	36	33
Number of Employees in Organization				
To 100	(50) 24	33	36	35
101 to 250	(56) 30	33	35	36
251 to 400	(61) 34	33	35	36
401 or more	(147) 34	32	35	36

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

The findings and practitioner recommendations are important as a fundamental input to our program revision. Prior to providing study information feedback to participants, potential educational administration program revision advisory committee members were identified from among the study's participating superintendents. Those superintendents accepting advisory committee responsibilities were invited to the Oklahoma University campus to receive their copies of the report, discuss finding implications for program revisions, and review school system administrator inservice training needs.

Advisory committee members demonstrated enthusiastic interest in the findings. They urged the educational administrator program professors to develop course outlines incorporating those goal statements receiving the highest priority (those prioritized one through eight by the total study sample) as the administrator preparation core courses. Advisory committee members expressed interest in reconvening at a later date to review and critique draft copies of the course outline.

One of our main program revision objectives has been the identification of core preparation experiences that would be required of all prospective administrators. Since our needs-sensing effort revealed that administrators in all types of positions are in substantial agreement on the items that ranked in the top third, it seems reasonable that a

core program include the content suggested by most of these items.

Faculty investigators were surprised, and as teachers involved in the preparation of administrators somewhat disappointed, at the low rankings received by some items. For example, *develop an understanding of management tools such as PERT, MBO, PPBS, etc.*, ranked number thirty of thirty-six. *Developing an understanding of systems theory* ranked thirty-one and, perhaps even more surprising, the item relating to the use of computers both operationally and in decision-making ranked number thirty-five. Although one might have anticipated differently, positions held and sizes of school systems seemed to make little difference in the low ranking of these items.

General administration faculty members do not believe this means materials relating to these items should not be included in our preparation programs. On the contrary, it may well be that our neglecting to emphasize and demonstrate the application of the newer management tools has resulted in practitioners transferring only limited usefulness to these concepts. In fact, the item relating to *develop and understanding of administrative theory* ranked higher than the investigators might have expected (eight in the overall sample and three by those in the smaller school systems). This may reflect the fact that significant attention had been given to such material in our classes for several years.

An examination of the responses by position provides additional evidence to support views about

content that should be included in programs designed for specific administrative positions. For example, superintendents and assistant superintendents consider instructional supervision and other curriculum-oriented material less important than principals. On the other hand, budgeting and financial reporting is ranked much higher by superintendents and assistant superintendents than by others.

The process utilized to carry out this project could be generalized to other situations where there is concern for program revision in which practitioners are involved and make meaningful input. The approach developed could be applied in fields other than educational administration and in public school systems seeking to redesign educational programs to meet specific needs.

During the meeting, program professors inquired of advisory group members regarding their interest in establishing a cooperative arrangement between the educational administration department and a school or schools to develop administrator inservice training programs. Since most were receptive to the concept, it is planned to select from among those superintendents expressing interest and develop cooperative training programs using the goal prioritization process developed in this study to determine their inservice content area training needs. Following determination of the training need, a program will be developed with content and learning experiences conceptualized jointly by district administrators and university professors. This concept is potentially powerful because it provides an opportunity for:

1. Professors and practitioners to join in a program developmental effort.

2. Current research to be adopted/adapted with minimum time lag and then field-trialed.
3. Innovative programs from the University or from the field to be incorporated in the content of on-campus educational administration courses and/or inservice administrator training activities.
4. Educational administration professors and school system administrators to be on the cutting edge in the development of relevant preparation programs for administrators.
5. Professor and administrator practitioner renewal.

The project described in this report has led to the initiation of a number of changes in our administrator preparation program. The first step has been the development of a core of four courses, two at the masters degree level and two at the post-masters level. We will deal with administration generically in the four courses, the first two focusing on the conceptual foundations of administration and the other two emphasizing management technology. These will ultimately be required of all students who are preparing for any administrative role in education.

We believe implementation of this cooperative effort will help mediate the theory-practice controversy and encourage cooperative relationships between professors and practitioners. Colleagues desiring additional information regarding the data collection instrument of goal prioritization process may contact professors Seaberg or Parker at the University of Oklahoma. □

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